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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement has been documented as the most effective method of improving student performance in school. This book explores ideas, strategies, and resources that parents and teachers can use in teaming together to facilitate productive student behavior and to deal positively with discipline issues. Parental role in discipline is discussed in terms of three forms of parental influence: (1) on the child's behavior; (2) on the first learning environment; and (3) on the child's attitudes. The discussion of parents and teachers as copartners in discipline focuses on the need, basis, and process for a team approach. Educating parents about discipline is explored by discussing parent education with a discipline focus and orienting parents to the classroom discipline approach. Additionally discussed are strategies for involving parents in discipline and for dealing with special discipline situations. It is concluded that teachers who use parent education and involvement strategies that focus on discipline have found them to be an important ingredient in successful classroom discipline programs. Parent-teacher teaming is indeed a key step toward achieving more productive student behavior. (RH)

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Parents and Teachers as Discipline Shapers

Kevin J. Swick

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Parents and Teachers as Discipline Shapers

Kevin J. Swick

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5

PARENTAL ROLE IN DISCIPLINE 5

- Parental Influence on the Child's Behavior 6
- Parental Influence on the First Learning Environment 7
- Parental Influence on the Child's Attitudes 8

PARENTS AND TEACHERS: COPARTNERS IN DISCIPLINE ... 9

- The Need for a Team Approach 9
- The Basis for a Team Approach 11
- The Process for a Team Approach 13

EDUCATING PARENTS ON DISCIPLINE 15

- Parent Education with a Discipline Focus 16
- Orienting Parents to the Classroom Discipline Approach ... 21

STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING PARENTS IN DISCIPLINE 24

DEALING WITH SPECIAL DISCIPLINE SITUATIONS 27

CONCLUSION 29

BIBLIOGRAPHY 30

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INTRODUCTION

Self-discipline is the main goal of all discipline efforts. Disruptive student behavior is a problem that influences the functioning of everyone: teachers, parents or other caretakers,* students, and the entire community. Unfortunately, the resolution of behavior problems and discipline issues is too often passed on to the teacher. Such a limited approach does not solve the discipline issue (7).** Student behavior is, of course, influenced by all facets of the home–school–community environment; consequently it requires the involvement of all concerned to become productive. Parents and teachers, as team leaders in the human development process, hold tremendous potential for guiding students in useful directions. Current research confirms the success of parent–teacher teams in supporting positive student development and functioning (8, 26, 27). To help children acquire productive ways of functioning, parents and teachers need educational insights on what their roles are and how they can carry them out in the home and the school (15, 28). This book explores ideas, strategies, and resources that parents and teachers can use in teaming to facilitate productive student behavior and to deal positively with discipline issues.

PARENTAL ROLE IN DISCIPLINE

The emergence of disruptive student behavior occurs over an extended time period and is usually rooted in the primary social environment, the family (4, 47). The dynamic human behavior patterns formed in the family influence the development and functioning of parents and children in all other environments such as the school or the workplace (10, 21). Parents are the shapers of this critical environment in which children acquire their first skills for relating to and interacting with others (5). Parents influence the child's early development of social skills in at least three ways,

*Because of the large numbers of children living in situations without either parent, the familial term "parent" as used in this publication is extended to include other caretakers.

**Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 30.

all of which impact the youngster's view of behavior in community situations such as the school:

1. Their personal influence on the child as significant others
2. Their designs of what the child encounters in the first school—the home
3. Their influence on the child's formation of attitudes and skills toward learning and education. (33, 43, 46)

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOR

Research indicates that parents are the most important influence in the child's early development of self-image. Typically, the parent is the only continuous adult model the child has access to on a daily basis. While children may encounter relatives, friends, child care workers, or grandparents in different situations, parents are their continuing source of security and guidance (2). In effect, parents *model* a set of behaviors that infants and young children use in forming images of how to function in the world (43). The more consistency and productivity in the parent-model, the more successfully the child can internalize socially useful behaviors (36, 42). The lack of a parent-model or the existence of a negative model can and often does influence the child's learning of antisocial behaviors (21, 40).

The following example indicates the powerful influence of parents on children:

Ted is a first grader who is having extreme difficulty responding to simple rules such as following directions and the daily learning schedule. Mrs. Jameson, his teacher, set up a conference with his mother to discuss the situation. Ted's mother said that she was "going it alone" since her husband left last year. "Ted has never had any consistency in his life," she added. "I'm at a loss about what to do, but I do want to help Ted." Mrs. Jameson explained that the school had a counselor who could help and that she would speak with him. She also explained how she would try to help Ted in the classroom and what could be done at home to improve the situation.

In addition to the modeling function, parental guidance influences the child's acquisition of socially competent attitudes and

behaviors (54). During each stage of development children seek guidance in resolving issues related to their better understanding of the world around them (10). For example, during infancy they seek assurance that the world is a trustworthy place. Their interactions with parents enable them to resolve this question. In the early childhood years, they experiment with ways to become constructively independent. Once again their involvement with parents helps them find acceptable answers. Their failure to form a trusting and industrious perception of their place in the home and school can result in long-term discipline problems (46, 52).

Moreover, discipline develops through the child's experiences in an organized environment. For example:

> Jean is expected to help out at home. After school she attends an extended schoolday program; in the evening she and her mother team on household chores and share their concerns in a comfortable manner. Homework and music lessons are scheduled into the extended day program. Jean and her mother live a busy but ordered life. She is a good example of a child from a single-parent family who leads a productive life because the relationships in the home are meaningful and positive.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON THE FIRST LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The parent shapes the young child's early learning environment. Whether child care is in the home or in a day care or child development center, the parent typically controls the child's introduction to discipline. Two important ways of influencing the child's behavior development are through (1) direct parental involvement with the child and (2) parental support of the child's early learning and development (2, 16). For example, White (54) found that when parents established clear, firm, and yet appropriate, discipline guidelines at an early age, the child's social behavior at school usually corresponded with desired behaviors. White identified this acquisition of discipline skills by the child as *social competence*.

In effect, parents, through direct involvement with their children, can "teach" discipline skills by setting limits (appropriate to the stage of development), redirecting destructive behavior toward

more constructive, socially accepted activities, and rewarding positive and productive behavior patterns (1, 17, 30). Continuous attention and communication are the most prevalent characteristics of parents whose children have these initial discipline skills (15).

In addition to interaction with the child, parents must support and arrange a productive social and cognitive environment. Children develop their conception of acceptable behavior through their experiences and their formation of a symbol system that reflects their concrete involvement with people, things, and ideas (9, 44). Experience and language acquisition go together and are internalized—at least initially—in the home. For example, children learn their initial ideas of structure through the experiences parents arrange in the home. Scheduled events such as mealtimes, bedtime, reading, recreation, and quiet times have a powerful influence on their early formation (2, 32, 35). The basic parameters for social interaction develop from these flexibly structured arrangements for parents and children. Eventually children develop a language-cognition symbol system to match their experiences; this enables them to expand and refine their entire repertoire of behaviors (22). Parents' support of their children's selection and use of experiences and their interaction with them in organizing a symbol system for interpreting events are crucial to the long-term behavior of their children (21).

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON THE CHILD'S ATTITUDES

Children's attitudes toward learning, school, and desirable social functioning are heavily influenced by parents. Simple exposure to books, cultural events, the outdoor learning environment, productive social exchanges, and other stimulating experiences help create in children a system for knowing how to relate to the world (4). It is important that parents understand that their "system" of living establishes the model that children use to organize their own way of interacting with life. According to research, parents who spend continuous time involving their children in language activities, books, varied social and cultural experiences, as well as in a great deal of verbal interaction not only with them, but also with friends and relatives, are preparing their offspring for school (46, 48, 54). Children who have a stimulating home environment acquire the language skills, the

listening habits, the receptive and expressive vocabulary, and the social competence that are essential for a productive school experience (43).

Productive behavior has been linked to the student's ability to participate effectively in the classroom environment, which, of course, mandates mastery of basic learning modes such as language, listening, cognitive processing, symbol system usage, and other skills (26). These learning modes are acquired in the home and/or preschool under the guidance of parents or their surrogates.

The parent is the educator's best resource for preventing the development of disruptive behavior in the child. A requisite part of all school-community activities should be school-sponsored parenting programs that focus on the parental role in supporting the child's early development of social skills (5). Osborn and Osborn underscore the significance of parental influence when they report that 80 percent of discipline problems are rooted in other than school contexts—with the large majority based in the child's family setting (44).

PARENTS AND TEACHERS: COPARTNERS IN DISCIPLINE

In varying degrees, parents and teachers have agreed that student discipline is an area of development that requires continuous attention (45). Beyond this sense of need, both parties have many ideas for dealing with student behavior. Diverse views and approaches for handling discipline issues can be productive, but a common framework of parent-teacher decisions that support students' social development is necessary.

THE NEED FOR A TEAM APPROACH

Views of child discipline are formed early in the life cycle of parents and teachers (51). Adults' treatment of children is often a reflection of the way they were treated in their early years. Knowledge and experience can help refine these ideas of disci-

pline. Children benefit from parent-teacher agreement on basic discipline issues because consistency helps them develop and refine their social skills (3, 8). Disparate views of discipline confuse the student, often upset both parent and teacher, and usually are counterproductive to a good parent-teacher-child relationship (23, 28).

Children require the continued support and guidance of both parents and teachers on discipline issues. Teachers supplement the critical parental role by extending the child's initial social behaviors to new situations and, it is hoped, to a new level of refinement. When parents and teachers work together and form a common understanding of discipline, their interactions with the child will be effective (8). School programs that have used a family-centered approach to learning have reported highly productive parent-teacher attitudes toward the child and thus fewer discipline problems (8, 23, 53). Such programs enlist parents as partners in forming discipline guidelines, maintain continuous communication with parents on all aspects of the child's development and learning, and provide parents with educational experiences to use in refining their parenting skills.

When discipline problems do arise, strong parent-teacher relationships are essential to resolving these difficulties. If parent and teacher are communicating regularly, for example, they have a basis for handling a potential problem before it becomes a crisis. Additionally, their respect for each other should help them solve even the most difficult issues (16). Consider the following example:

Mrs. Lewis was concerned that several of her fifth graders were becoming behavior problems. At the beginning of the school year she saw no need for articulating expected behaviors to the children and their parents. Now, in January, however, problems were compounding and order in the classroom was almost nonexistent. In analyzing the situation with a colleague, Mrs. Lewis identified two areas of concern for resolving the problem: (1) clear guidelines for student behavior and (2) communication of these guidelines to the students and their parents.

Planning that anticipates a problem before it arises can, in most cases, avoid the problem. If Mrs. Lewis had communicated her behavioral expectations to both students and parents early in the

year, the discipline problems would in all likelihood not have developed. The development of "proactive" social behaviors in students is a continuous process requiring in-depth participation of parents and teachers. Independent individuals emerge from environments where productive adult models guide them toward their full moral-social development.

THE BASIS FOR A TEAM APPROACH

Parent-teacher teaming begins with clarifying the roles each can perform to enable children and adolescents to develop and extend their discipline skills (17, 28). Parent roles have been identified by various researchers. Schaefer (37), for example, identifies the following as significant in forming positive social behaviors in students:

- Modeling productive social behavior.
- Designing a home setting that provides children with a structure that guides them to form effective planning skills.
- Communicating with children about acceptable social behavior.
- Intervening when children's behavior is antisocial to help them acquire an understanding of necessary limits.
- Initiating learning activities that enable children to acquire social and cognitive skills for functioning in social situations.
- Reinforcing social behaviors being promoted in the school.
- Supporting teacher efforts to help children develop self-discipline skills by continuous communication with the teacher and implementing needed discipline actions at home.
- Maintaining an awareness of children's developmental status and adjusting behavioral expectations accordingly.

Parental guidance is also a key to helping children refine their development as they reach new milestones in life.

Swick (46) examines several professional roles teachers can use in establishing a family-school approach to discipline:

- Using parent education programs to sharpen parent understanding of child development and behavior.
- Facilitating parent interest in acquiring skills that promote

positive discipline patterns early in the child's life.

- Initiating parent contacts prior to the child's entrance into the school system so that parent and teacher can discuss the child's strengths, needs, and interests.
- Articulating expected student behaviors and communicating these to children and parents. Many teachers find it beneficial to involve parents and students (at the appropriate stage of development) in formulating behavior guidelines.
- Communicating continuously with parents about the entire range of student behaviors in the classroom. The exchange of parent-teacher views about the student's development enables both parties to support each other's efforts.
- Conducting parent orientation on the classroom management process as well as the curriculum. Classroom teachers have found opening-of-school orientation programs to be well attended by parents and beneficial in establishing a solid family-school arrangement for dealing with various issues that may arise later in the term.
- Using many and varied methods of contacting and interacting with parents. Positive reinforcement of productive student behavior with students and parents helps to increase students' focus on constructive outlets. Sharing student work products with parents and alerting them to specific student accomplishments are two positive ways to promote discipline.
- Alerting parents through conferences or phone calls to any major behavior changes in students. When appropriate, group conferences can be used to deal with discipline issues of concern to all parents. For example, in some communities drugs and suicide have become concerns to parents of adolescents.
- Diagnosing and articulating behavior problems to students. Early identification of a behavior problem and arrangements to resolve the issue with parental involvement and support can prevent major crises.
- Providing parents with community resources they can use to cope with serious student or family behavior issues. Abnormal and pathological behavior syndromes need the attention of professional psychiatrists and trained social workers.

Teachers play many roles in facilitating positive student behavior. Permeating all these roles is their treatment of students as individually unique and valued classroom participants. Research indicates that teacher-student and parent-teacher interaction patterns resemble the style of student behavior in the classroom (31).

There are certain similar roles that parents and teachers can carry out. For example, they can *model* behaviors they would like students to internalize (11, 16). By being sensitive, reasonable, listening, compassionate, and positive people, parents and teachers influence student development far more powerfully than any lecture. Additional roles include taking an interest in their activities, supporting their special interests or hobbies, sharing common concerns with them, listening to their opinions on issues, involving them in meaningful work experiences, rewarding their achievements, involving them in working through the full range of their socio-emotional concerns, and helping them redirect their behavior toward productive results when needed (23, 41).

Essential to long-term parent-teacher relationships is a mutual respect for the significant roles each performs. Because parents and teachers are dealing with very dynamic issues in supporting student development, they must respect each other's strengths, their human fallibility, and the difficulties they encounter in implementing their roles. Developing and strengthening the parent-teacher bond requires continuous interaction. Both formal and informal contacts enable the parties to see each other's situation, exchange observations of student behavior, and plan actions they see as beneficial to improving student functioning (3, 23, 34).

THE PROCESS FOR A TEAM APPROACH

Specific parent-teacher discipline plans will benefit from a formal approach (8). Successful programs use six major components in their designs: (1) mutually defined objectives, (2) flexible use of objectives to help students become self-guided, (3) sharing of discipline procedures for use in home and school environments, (4) formation of some mechanism for ongoing parent-teacher interaction, (5) dissemination of information on discipline issues of special significance to the student age group, and (6) a process for evaluating the success of the program (46). At the center of each component is the mutual planning and work of parents and

teachers seeking a productive approach to discipline.

Parents and teachers use various approaches to arrive at mutually agreed-upon goals for student discipline. Some techniques used to generate parent interest and concern include parent surveys, newsletters, conferences, and group meetings. Regardless of technique, however, a logical starting point is a definition of acceptable behavior and desired social skills for students to achieve (45). Once they have identified these desired goals, parent-teacher teams can examine their appropriate uses. Flexible use of discipline goals is necessary because individual students arrive in the classroom at different stages of maturity. For example, some students may have a high level of self-discipline while others may need nurturing and guidance in understanding desired behavior goals (4). Developmental levels, then, will also influence adaptation of these goals. Although certain student behaviors are desirable, it is important to recognize that human beings function in a developmental context (10). Because discipline is a continuous learning process, parent-teacher teams that integrate a lifespan view into their planning are certain to find more success than those that plan more rigidly (15, 29).

Parent-teacher teams can share strategies and information they find useful in promoting self-discipline in students. Since each student is a unique individual, this sharing among parents and teachers is essential for supporting students in ways that will work. Consider the following example:

Mr. Rice was rather assertive in his teaching techniques and some of the quieter, more introverted students found his class difficult. Ms. Edwards noticed that her son Bill was inventing excuses to avoid the class. When she confronted Bill, she learned that it was not the content of social studies but the teacher's personality that was causing the problem. Ms. Edwards arranged to meet with Mr. Rice. She explained to him that Bill was not aggressive and could best be related to in a more sensitive manner. Mr. Rice accepted this suggestion well. He explained that his previous class had been very aggressive and that he had adopted stern ways of dealing with that group. "It is time to rethink the situation," he said. "Please keep in touch, Ms. Edwards, and thanks for bringing this to my attention."

This situation highlights the need for continuous interchange between parent and teacher. Both need feedback on how the student is functioning at home, at school, and throughout the community (23). The teacher needs to know of any special situation a student is experiencing at home in order to take this into account in classroom teaching (29). The more frequently parent and teacher interact, the more productive student behavior they will observe in the classroom and the home (42, 46).

Schools that have effective discipline programs are characterized as being supportive of parents through information sharing on behavior issues (8). Information provides parents and teachers a context from which to function with students. For example, Atlas Elementary School conducted a workshop on "Desirable Homework Behaviors for Students" to provide parents with a picture of what should be expected of their children. Middle schools and high schools have found it beneficial to hold group sessions on drug abuse. The topics may vary, but the intent is the same at all levels—to help parents relate more effectively to their children (1, 23).

If a discipline program is faltering, close scrutiny can reveal areas that need refining. Program assessment should be continuous and should be conducted by parents and teachers. It should focus on strengths as well as weaknesses. How has the program improved student behavior? What facets of the program were weak and why? What areas of the program worked and why? Questions such as these help team members see how their efforts are working, where improvements can be made, and how they might proceed to build a better program (46).

EDUCATING PARENTS ON DISCIPLINE

Many teachers have observed the connection between student behavior problems and uninvolved parents. Involved and knowledgeable parents are a strong ally for teachers in an effective discipline approach. Research indicates that early school contacts with parents through specially designed educational projects can influence parental perspectives toward the child's learning and

behavior (5, 48). For example, White (54) found parents of preschoolers reporting a higher level of confidence in dealing with discipline issues after completing a program on the social development of children. Others involved in researching the effects of parent education programs reported similar results (3, 20). Another dimension of parent education is orienting parents to the school's discipline approach. Teachers report many benefits from this practice, often citing it as a foundation for any successful venture (8). In fact, educating parents about the total school program is becoming an accepted and valued practice.

PARENT EDUCATION WITH A DISCIPLINE FOCUS

A recognized trait of self-disciplined students is their early acquisition of social skills in the home learning environment (52, 54). Parent education programs that focus on discipline tend to organize their goals around the development of the students they serve. In this context, parent education goals can be organized according to the following developmental levels: preschool, early childhood, elementary school, middle school, and high school (48). Examples of such goals at each of these levels follow.

Preschool

1. Assist parents in developing and expanding their knowledge of children's behavior and development.
2. Provide parents with essential child care skills with an emphasis on socio-emotional development.
3. Expand parents' skills in guiding children toward constructive behavior such as functioning within a structure and dealing with conflict in a positive way.

Early Childhood

1. Reinforce parental understanding of the importance of supporting children's positive behavior patterns.
2. Provide parents with both the basis and the strategies for encouraging children's development of independent behavior.
3. Support parental attempts to redirect children's antisocial behavior with practical strategies they can use in the home.

Elementary School

1. Develop in parents a sense of importance about students' regular attendance at school and consistent completion of assignments.
2. Involve parents in direct educational experiences by having them serve as resource persons and classroom volunteers.
3. Reinforce parental understanding of the importance of their children's involvement in a variety of recreational, cultural, and work experiences to facilitate their total development.

Middle School

1. Involve parents in expanding their knowledge of the unique aspects of development and learning that occur during pre- and early adolescence.
2. Remind parents of their complex role in providing flexible guidance to middle schoolers.
3. Provide parents with information on community activities they can use to involve students in exploratory experiences.

High School

1. Alert parents to the major problems adolescents often experience during this stage of development.
2. Reinforce parents in their role as communicators with their adolescents.
3. Support parents and their adolescents in career exploration activities and early job experimentation through community-sponsored work programs.

Successful programs that focus on expanding parent understanding of discipline use a proactive approach—that is, they direct goals and strategies to enhance both parent and student abilities in forming positive behavior skills (17, 23). Most programs include problem-solving goals to deal with discipline problems and apply these goals to specific situations as needed.

The content of parent programs with an emphasis on discipline varies according to need. The following examples have been used successfully by many teachers.

Effective Families, Effective Schools. This program focuses on what comprises an effective family learning environment and how this can contribute to the child's functioning at school. Topics include parent-child relations, family communications, and the overall organization of the home learning arrangement (35).

Discipline Begins at Home. This program emphasizes establishing a positive approach to discipline during the child's early life stages and continuing it throughout the student's development. Materials on "parents as behavior models," "rewarding positive behavior," "intervening to redirect antisocial behavior," and "setting limits for the child" characterize such programs (1).

The Importance of Self-Image. This program emphasizes the message that student behavior is usually a reflection of how students see themselves in relation to their environment. Disruptive students are often insecure, unable to fully participate in home or school events, and—for many reasons—they feel isolated from the mainstream of events in their world. This program explores parent roles in fostering a positive self-image in students. It includes such strategies as supporting the child's interests, fostering self-pride, and promoting the development of social competence (15).

The Three C's of Discipline. This program introduces parents to the three C's of effective discipline: Consistency, Cooperation, and Competence. It uses specific parent-child-school situations to stress the importance of these basics of discipline. For example, the program stresses parental consistency in reinforcing children's positive behavior, helping children develop a cooperative attitude toward other family members and then extending this to school situations, as well as helping children gain competence and confidence in group living skills. Parents are encouraged to share ideas and challenges they face in trying to achieve these skills with their children. Teachers share examples of how they reinforce the development of these skills in students and explain how the skills are connected to school success (38, 45).

Dealing with Discipline Issues. This program explores typical discipline issues that parents confront and examines approaches and strategies they can use in dealing with the issues. In most

cases the program begins with parent input, including questions or concerns they want to share with the group. A moderator collates the issues, compares the group responses with parent concerns in general, and then selects certain issues for in-depth treatment. A problem-solving approach to resolving discipline issues is used to show how behavior can be redirected through many different strategies. The role of the parent as family leader is emphasized throughout the workshop (17, 44).

Discipline at School, You and Your Child. This program provides parents and teachers with an excellent opportunity to establish a framework for a positive approach to discipline. Its emphasis is twofold: (1) strengthening parental awareness of the school's discipline approach and the critical role parents play in implementing it and (2) involving parents in learning about the school's discipline guidelines and specific ways to help their children participate successfully. During the workshop, school and classroom discipline policies are identified, explained, and discussed. Parents and teachers share ideas on how they can use a team approach to implement the program effectively (14, 23).

Supporting the Development of Self-Discipline. Autonomy is the main goal of all discipline efforts. This workshop design includes three areas of parent skill development aimed at nurturing the child toward self-discipline: modeling productive behavior, initiating activities that promote independent social behavior in the child, and guiding the child toward accepting responsibility for his/her actions (22). Self-discipline is presented as a developmental process that is acquired through continued practice and experience, much like the learning of cognitive skills (22). For example, parents are asked to identify areas of their lives over which they have developed some control and to describe how they achieved this process. Additional activities involve parents in formulating ideas on how to foster self-discipline in their children. As a culminating activity, parents are asked to identify specific areas of behavior they can foster in their children and strategies they will use in this endeavor (15).

Developmental Changes, Discipline, and Parents. Many discipline "problems" emerge when students experience developmental shifts in their lives. Typical examples are the transition points

from childhood to adolescence or related environmental shifts such as moving to a new community or realignments within the family due to divorce or death (13). Periods of high stress can lead to feelings of insecurity and resulting behavior changes. In a workshop setting parents explore the major developmental and environmental shifts that students experience and discuss ideas for assisting them in coping with these changes (9, 19). Two major points are examined: (1) the uniqueness of each student's response to change and (2) parent dialogue with students about major life changes and developmental transitions as an effective beginning point for dealing with change (2, 11).

Various procedures can be used to develop parent education programs with a discipline focus. Such programs can emerge through the initiative of classroom teachers, the use of parent-teacher organization resources, school-community interagency planning, or a combination of these and other human service groups (7). Content areas such as those identified in this publication or workshop topics more pertinent to parent needs can form the basis for valuable programs. A key to success in all cases is the involvement of parents in all facets of the program. Teacher talents and community resources are good sources of leadership.

Like other parent education efforts, discipline programs need continous assessment and refinement. Key areas to examine include the following:

- Has parent knowledge of student discipline increased as a result of program activities?
- Are parents using ideas gained in the workshops with their children?
- Is a parent-teacher team focus on discipline emerging in the family-school relationship?
- Is a positive approach to functioning evolving in the school's student population?

Parent surveys, parent attendance records, teacher observations of student behavior, and parent communication with the school about student behavior are some assessment methods to use in analyzing the program (12).

Many resources are available for use with parents in programs on discipline. The National Education Association resources that follow are suggested, for example.

NEA RESOURCES FOR PARENTING PROGRAMS ON DISCIPLINE

Print

1. *Behavior Modification* (2d ed.) by Robert J. Presbie and Paul L. Brown
2. *Developing Positive Student Self-Concept* (2d ed.) by David L. Silvernail
3. *Discipline That Works* by Jane L. Williams
4. *Disruptive Student Behavior in the Classroom* (2d ed.) by Kevin J. Swick
5. *Maintaining Productive Student Behavior* (rev. ed.) by Kevin J. Swick
6. *Parent/Community Involvement Leaflets*
7. *Parent-Teacher Conferencing* by Joseph C. Rotter and Edward H. Robinson III
8. *Parenting* by Kevin J. Swick and R. Eleanor Duff

Filmstrips

1. *Helping Your Child Grow Up*
2. *Helping Your Child in School*
3. *How to Listen to Your Child* and *How to Get Your Child to Listen to You* (two parts)
4. *Parent-Teacher Conferences*
5. *Parental Discipline*
6. *Parents and Teachers Together for the Benefit of Children* (two-parts)

ORIENTING PARENTS TO THE CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE APPROACH

Confusion about school and classroom discipline procedures is a major cause of parent-teacher-student conflict. Unclear guidelines and inconsistent application of classroom rules or school policies are certain to influence the development of student behavior problems (44). One way to prevent such occurrences is to have clear discipline guidelines and an educational process that enables parents and students to learn about these expectations (45). In most cases discipline procedures and guidelines exist at three levels: school district, school building, and classroom. Typically, school system policies set the broad framework for developing a productive approach to discipline. At the school building level, specific policies regarding student behavior are clarified and out-

lined. At the classroom level the discipline process is fully integrated into the student's development and learning (27, 30).

Most school programs use a handbook that includes the discipline philosophy and information on school rules to give parents a general understanding of the situation. Specific orientation programs with accompanying teacher-prepared materials can expand parent and student perspectives on expectations for behavior, rules, and related discipline issues. An effective orientation program includes the formation of an ongoing system that allows parents and teachers to work together to implement and refine a discipline focus that leads students toward responsible social functioning. The following is an example of one teacher's parent orientation program:

Mr. Johnson, a fifth grade teacher, has found success with his parent education approach to discipline. Before the opening of school, Mr. Johnson sent a letter to each parent-child team introducing himself to the family, explaining his approach to working with the family as a learning team, and outlining his plan to involve everyone in establishing a productive learning environment. During the first or second week of school, Mr. Johnson held an orientation program for the parents of his students, at which time he focused on the following key discipline issues:

- The discipline philosophy used throughout the school. This philosophy, he explained, was intended to help all students become self-disciplined, taking control of their lives and accepting responsibility for their choices.
- The key guidelines for student behavior used in the classroom. Mr. Johnson listed these key behaviors on the chalkboard:

  1. Maintain a positive attitude.
  2. Be sensitive to the needs and situations of other students.
  3. Use the learning environment effectively—cleaning up areas you have used, for example.
  4. Complete assignments in a thorough manner and turn them in on time.
  5. Behave with confidence, listen to the ideas of others, and participate in class activities.

Mr. Johnson explained that his focus is a positive one, flexible enough to account for each student's uniqueness and yet clear enough to manage group functioning. By using a proactive approach to discipline, he said he was able to promote students' responsibility for their behavior. Mr. Johnson then identified behaviors each parent could use to help him implement the program:

- Maintain a positive attitude toward the child and the child's participation in school.
- Take an interest in the child's school work and discuss this with the child.
- Reward the child's accomplishments and help the child build a sense of self-confidence.
- Involve the child in family activities and give her/him specific ways to contribute to the family's welfare.
- Wherever possible, support the child's interests by involving him/her in various learning activities.

Mr. Johnson explained that children who have interests and linkages at home and in the community usually have a successful school experience.

Then he invited parents to ask questions or share any concerns they might have about his concept of discipline. Following a discussion, he handed each parent a schedule of parent conferences he had planned for the school year. These conferences would provide a chance for parents to learn about their children's progress and behavioral development in the classroom. He explained that he would reschedule conference times as parent schedules dictated. In addition, he noted that whenever he saw the need for parents to be a part of resolving a discipline issue he would call on them, explain the situation, and involve them in resolving it.

Mr. Johnson's parent orientation to his classroom discipline approach is an excellent example of how to establish a family-centered program. The involvement of parents in school discipline programs is essential to successful endeavors (3).

STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING PARENTS IN DISCIPLINE

A primary factor in successful discipline programs is the full support and participation of parents (33, 53). Studies on disruptive student behavior point to the lack of parental involvement as a major cause of discipline problems (44, 47). Seven strategies for involving parents in the discipline process follow.

Strategy 1. Involve parents in formulating a home-school discipline approach. The key is to request parental participation in shaping a discipline program that functions for students at home and at school. The use of parent surveys, group meetings, and individual contacts with parents nurtures a discipline philosophy that benefits both family and school. Find out what parent concerns are, share your ideas on discipline with parents, and integrate these views into a workable program. Sponsor parent information sessions to explain and discuss the final discipline program. Throughout the year maintain close relationships with parents—providing them with feedback on student behavior, inviting their questions about discipline, and fostering their intense involvement with their children (46).

Strategy 2. Involve parents in observing and communicating about their children's behavior. Parent observation of the child's behavior is a source of valuable information for the classroom teacher. Parents have many opportunities to observe their children in diverse settings and, through their intense interactions with their offspring, they can share important insights with teachers on student behavior patterns, skills, and interests. For example, a teacher who is aware that a child is somewhat shy can integrate this information into instructional planning. One way to encourage parent communication with teachers about the child's behavior and development is the use of family inventory programs in which parents identify family interaction styles, family activities, special traits of the child, and basic information on the child's learning style (46). Another approach is to form parent-teacher study groups in which parents share information on topics that include child development, parent-child relations, and discipline.

Strategy 3. Conference with parents on the student's social development and behavior. Although much time is typically devoted to reporting a student's academic progress, teacher reports on student behavior are often used after a problem has emerged. Charting, graphing, or recording student behavior patterns and using information gained in parent conferences can enable parents and teachers to see the student's progress in social and behavioral competence (34). For example:

Mr. Donovan identifies key behaviors he wants students to develop during the school year, he communicates these to students and parents, and he observes and records student behavior patterns related to the desired discipline goals throughout the year. In conferences with parents and students he discusses his observations and, where needed, requests cooperation from parents to help students attain the goals identified.

Parent-teacher dialogue about student behavior not only assures their focusing on this important area of student functioning, but also serves to remind students that behavior is an important part of their learning (34, 45).

Strategy 4. Involve parents in problem-solving sessions to resolve discipline issues. Most discipline problems are related to the student's total functioning (21, 26). Parent involvement in resolving behavior problems increases the chances of channeling the behavior in a productive direction (53). Presenting a discipline issue to parents as a problem to be solved is a constructive way to establish a process for improving student behavior. The following steps are suggested to gain parent support in resolving various discipline issues:

1. Clearly identify the specific student behavior problem(s) in your teaching framework—for example, a persistent problem with a student not completing assignments.
2. Review steps you have attempted to use in correcting the problem—for example, list strategies you have used to encourage students to turn in assignments on time.

3. Communicate with the student and the parent your concern about the discipline issue.
4. Involve the student and the parent in reviewing procedures that can be used to resolve the issue.
5. Provide the student and the parent with feedback on student progress (or lack thereof) in correcting the behavior or redirecting it more productively.
6. Continue the process of parent-teacher-student communication about student behavior in the classroom. Continued communication is essential to building a positive basis for solving discipline issues.

Strategy 5. Refer parents and children to appropriate counseling sources when needed. In some cases, student and/or family behavior problems will be severe and require counseling expertise beyond the skills and training of the classroom teacher. In cases where child abuse is the problem, social and counseling services will be needed to handle the situation. Teachers should also be aware of their legal obligation to report not only actual cases of child abuse, but also suspected cases (49, 50). While many teachers use special strategies to help children who are victims of tragic situations, they usually and appropriately involve trained professionals to deal with the issue itself. By organizing a compendium of available community resources, teachers will be able to refer parents to resource professionals when the need arises (29).

Strategy 6. Form group conferences where parents can learn and share ideas about discipline issues. All or at least a majority of parents desire information on certain discipline and behavior issues in order to gain a better grasp of the problem. During the early childhood years, for example, most parents want information on what they should and should not expect of their children. Parents of middle schoolers are currently interested in the drug issue, the rising rate of adolescent suicide, and the behavior patterns of adolescents (9, 10). Group conferences or study sessions on topics of concern to parents can help prevent some student behavior problems or at least deal with them in a reasonable manner (46).

Strategy 7. Inform parents of positive behaviors their children exhibit. Reinforcing and continally nurturing positive student

behavior is the best approach to limiting antisocial activities. Planned feedback to parents on their children's accomplishments is an effective means of enhancing the behavior of students and parents. This process can be carried out in several ways: handwritten notes to parents, telephone calls, feature issues of the classroom newsletter, and sharing student progress with parents in conferences (46). This strategy can be extended by encouraging parents to use it with their children.

DEALING WITH SPECIAL DISCIPLINE SITUATIONS

There are unique situations in which parents, students, and teachers behave without concern for desired discipline goals and practices. For example, parents who are so involved in dealing with financial and/or other personal stressors may not respond to the teacher's call for involvement in the child's learning of discipline. Teachers can deal with such cases by spending time in special contacts with parents reminding them of their role in helping the child develop positive behavior patterns. Some techniques for responding to these special situations are as follows:

1. Assess the family situations of your students early in the school year to determine which situations may need special attention.
2. Meet with parents early in the school year and encourage them to become full partners in the discipline-shaping process.
3. In responding to special parenting situations, be sensitive to the conditions parents face, and use school and community resources such as counseling services to help parents deal with their problems.
4. Provide leadership in your school for developing education programs that reach parents early in their involvement with children.

5. Develop school and community efforts that support parents in carrying out their complex roles—for example, family counseling centers, extended schoolday programs, community-sponsored recreation programs (40).

In some cases parents may need assistance in better understanding their child's behavioral syndrome. For example, poor health, such as severe dental problems, may mask the cause of disruptive behavior and when attended to may provide at least a partial solution (16). Also consider the hyperactive child who may have nutritional problems or the young adolescent who appears out-of-touch with life but is actually on drugs. Understanding student behavior depends on the continuous involvement of parents and teachers in student development, lifestyles, and peer relationships (9).

Another situation, the diversity of cultural and family lifestyles, may present a challenge for accommodating individual behaviors in the classroom group setting. Two strategies worth considering here are (1) integrating the cultural values and customs of families into the curriculum and (2) articulating a classroom discipline process that provides for both group and individual needs. Once again, the significance of parent-teacher cooperation in establishing both an effective learning system and a positive understanding of the desired student discipline program is highlighted (40).

Finally, the family caught in the web of pathological living patterns (abuse, alcoholism, severe neglect) and unable to participate in the discipline-shaping process should be directed to psychiatric counseling and rehabilitation. The sooner the family pathology is dealt with, the more likely the parents are to become effective in carrying out their roles (29).

CONCLUSION

Parent involvement has been documented as the most effective method of improving student performance in school (46). The participation of parents in preventing and/or resolving discipline issues is now receiving the attention it deserves. While not an easy process, the education of parents concerning their role in supporting productive student behavior is essential to any long-term success. Early in the life of the child the parent can establish social skills that will serve the child for a lifetime. Continued parent involvement in school discipline matters can extend these positive beginnings to further growth toward self-discipline in the school environment. Teachers who use parent education and involvement strategies that focus on discipline have found them to be an important ingredient in successful classroom discipline programs. Parent-teacher teaming is indeed a key step toward achieving more productive student behavior.

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